



Mr. Ferris and His Wheel

Kathryn Gibbs Davis , Gilbert Ford (Illustrations)

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Capturing an engineer's creative vision and mind for detail, this fully illustrated picture book biography sheds light on how the American inventor George Ferris defied gravity and seemingly impossible odds to invent the world's most iconic amusement park attraction, the Ferris wheel.

A fun, fact-filled text by Gibbs Davis combines with Gilbert Ford's dazzling full-color illustrations to transport readers to the 1893 World's Fair, where George Ferris and his big, wonderful wheel lifted passengers to the skies for the first time.

Mr. Ferris and His Wheel Details

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Author : Kathryn Gibbs Davis , Gilbert Ford (Illustrations)

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From Reader Review Mr. Ferris and His Wheel for online ebook

Elisabeth Cole says

The story of the first Ferris Wheel had a lot of potential but fell short. I wish the author had included more information about George Ferris and his other achievements.

Elisabeth says

1) Fitch, S. (2012). Night sky wheel ride. Vancouver: Tradewind Books.

2) Night Sky Wheel Ride uses poetry to describe the sensation of riding on a Ferris wheel. The author and illustrator combine fanciful words and illustrations to show this joy. The imagery in the poetry contrasts well with the factual information from “Mr. Ferris and His Wheel.” In my unit about inventions and inventors, I would read the fiction book first to spark the excitement of my students and to activate their prior knowledge. Then, I would use the nonfiction text to show how the Ferris wheel was invented. These two texts fit well together because the fiction text portrays the emotional, experiential side of the Ferris wheel; while the nonfiction text gives facts about the design and engineering of the wheel.

3) The text structure of Mr. Ferris and His Wheel is a combination of description and chronological order. The author uses rich word choice to describe the process Mr. Ferris went through to build his wheel for the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair.

4) As I mentioned previously, I would use the reading strategy “activating prior knowledge” when reading these texts with my students. After reading the fiction text, I would ask students to brainstorm anything they knew about Ferris wheels. I would encourage them to write down both factual and affective things. I would then ask them to draw a model of a Ferris wheel. As we read the nonfiction text, I would stop and have the students label some of the engineering features of the wheel on their pictures, such as the spokes, axle, and tension wheels. After reading the nonfiction text, we would look at our brainstorm lists to make connections between our feelings and experiences on a Ferris wheel to how a Ferris wheel actually works.

Kathryn says

4.5 STARS

I really enjoyed this, even though it didn't quite become magical for me. The illustrations didn't wow me, though they did a decent job conveying a feel for the era and showing what was going on with the wheel. I liked the little side-notes adding depth to the story/history though I just skipped them when I did the read-aloud with my sons and filled in later since it would break-up the flow of the story. I appreciated the incorporation of actual quotes from the historical figures and felt that we got a sense of Mr. Ferris' personality (or, at least, his extreme pride in the field of engineering!) and the remarkable accomplishment in conceiving, designing, financing and building the wheel really came through for me. I'm also personally just really interested in the world's fairs so this was right up my ally. If anyone knows of other good picture books

about worlds fairs, please let me know :-)

Alex (not a dude) Baugh says

A mere ten months before the start of the 1893 World's Fair, the planners were still looking for a star attraction. The French had really outdone themselves at the previous World's Fair by showcasing the Eiffel Tower in 1889, and now something even more spectacular was wanted. A contest was held, but all the entries looked like Eiffel Tower imitations.

Enter George Washington Gale Ferris, Jr., an engineer who had a dream. Instead of going straight up and being stationary, George's dream was round and moving. At first, his proposal was rejected by the contest judges as too big, too complicated, but as the time for the fair drew closer, the judges changed their minds, but refused to fund George's project. With the help of private investors, and a lot of hard work, the 1893 World's Fair opened with a most successful star attraction: The Ferris Wheel.

Kathryn Gibbs Davis has written this wonderfully detailed, absolutely accessible picture book about the first Ferris wheel for older readers who have most likely seen and maybe ever ridden a Ferris wheel, but who probably have never thought about how it was done, or by whom, for that matter.

What an inspiring story it is, too. George Ferris met with obstacles from the judges first rejection of his idea, to his difficulties getting his dream wheel funded, and when ground was finally broken, the workmen ran into problems with broken tools, quicksand (yes, quicksand, the stuff of grade B movies), Chicago's strong winds, and, of course, skepticism. But George Ferris had a dream and perseverance, as well as confidence in his skill as an engineer and in the new amazingly strong metal - steel - that he used and his dream came true on June 21, 1893, opening day of the World's Fair.

Not only has Gibbs written a very readable book, but she has included sidebars of factual information throughout the book, giving more information about the Ferris Wheel and how George made it work. And there is lots of wonderful back matter, including quote sources, a selected bibliography and websites the curious can visit for more information. There is also a photograph of George Washington Gale Ferris, Jr., taken from the Chicago World's Fair pamphlet.

The illustrations are done in a digitally mixed media using ink and watercolor and using a soft palette of purples, yellows, blues and greens and that just feel so right for the time period. I particularly liked the cover illustration showing the Ferris Wheel lit up again a night sky, towering over the buildings that surround it, but under the twinkling stars of the heavens. It gives such a wonderful perspective of the magnitude of this amazing accomplishment.

When was the last time you were on a Ferris Wheel? I was 6 and it was on the Wonder Wheel in Coney Island.

This book is recommended for readers age 7+

This book was purchased for my personal library

This review was originally posted at Randomly Reading

Jenny says

I really, really love the illustrations in this text. I love the color scheme and the lovely illustrations. The text explains that as the 1893 Chicago World's Fair approached, people desperately wanted to build something that would outshine the Eiffel Tower which had been the star attraction the year before. A contest was created, but none of the entries were unique. George Ferris had an idea for a giant wheel that would carry passengers, but no one thought it would work. The World Fair judges gave him permission to build it but they would not finance it. Banks would not give him a loan. He found a few investors and used his own money and began building. There were difficulties but at last it was ready. Ferris and others climbed aboard for the first ride at the opening of the World Fair.

This draws the reader right in. It contains a bibliography, source notes and websites to visit. As a teacher, I noticed the important role captions play in this book so this would be great to use in a classroom to demonstrate how text and illustration work together and to point out captions as a text feature...as well as to help younger students learn how to read captions.

Mary Dobner says

This book is the epitome of what an informational text/biography should be. Generally when hearing those two genres, you moan a little, expecting a boring nonfiction book that would take hours to struggle through. Not the case with Mr. Ferris. Kathryn Gibbs Davis took this little known story (the creation of the Ferris wheel) and brought it to life in this book. The illustrations are incredible and grab you from the moment you open the book. She made the story humorous and relatable as well as showcasing some awesome traits found in engineers and scientists! The book would inspire all young readers to keep trying to achieve their dreams, and never give up, even in the face of opposition.

This book would be perfect for a read aloud in a 2-4 classroom. The pictures are bright and attention grabbing, but the words are a little more complicated, as well as the ideas. I would use this book when teaching about character traits. Davis includes a lot of explicit and implied traits in her book about Mr. Ferris. She states that he was inquisitive and imaginary, but from the book you have to decide that he showed great levels of perseverance and fortitude. This would be awesome to use for a modeling activity where you show students how to "read between the lines" to find expressive character traits that tell us lots about the character.

The reason this book struck me so much was definitely the illustrations. They create a whole beautiful world full of inventors and inventions (like steamboats, eiffel tower, etc) and I found myself engaged in the story, but also in finding out what beautiful new world i would find on the next page.

Paul says

Nice narrative intro to this American engineering achievement and it's inventor. The illustrations were disappointing for such a towering invention, cartoon-like in a Disney quick treatment. For no apparent reason, the color scheme tilts toward purple, while captions (as opposed to the narrative) appear in a different typeface in random placement.

Stephanie says

This is the inspiring picture book biography of George Ferris and how he came to build a structure that defied gravity and became a staple at fairs, carnivals, and amusement parks. How many of us have ridden a Ferris Wheel at some point in our lives? I have to say I was intrigued by her pick and curious to learn how the first one came to be. The World's Fair was coming to Chicago in 1893, so the search was on for the design that would top the Eiffel Tower, the standout of the last fair. None of the ideas were new and exciting enough for the committee. When George Ferris, an engineer, brought his proposal to the board they weren't sure because they thought it was too big and that it wouldn't work. The fair was only a handful of months away when the committee decided to give the go ahead to Ferris. There was intense pressure for everyone working on the project and they also had to deal with frozen ground and Chicago weather.

The story really makes you feel the anticipation when Ferris and his wife take the first ride. I would have been so scared! I loved learning about how the invention came together was surprised to hear about the large glass cars. Once the fair was over it was even taken down and put up at other locations! Wow! I was amazed at how fun it was to learn about history from this delightful picture book. After we finished I had to look up what the cars looked like, since I couldn't imagine how big they were. I was stunned!

Mr. Ferris and His Wheel is a great book for people who like to learn about history in an interesting way or for people who like a good ride. I bet you will learn something new too!

Jenni says

Nonfiction #2:

Davis, Kathryn Gibbs. (2014). Mr. Ferris and his wheel. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company.

Possible crossover subject: History and/or physical science

Fiction Twin Text:

Fitch, Sheree. (2012). Night Sky Wheel Ride. Vancouver, BC: Tradewind Books.

Mr. Ferris and His Wheel is a narrative nonfiction telling of how George Ferris came up with the idea of building a moveable wheel that people could ride on. His motivation was that Chicago was going to be hosting the World's Fair, and the United States wanted a showpiece that would outdo France's Eiffel Tower. George Ferris got his chance, although he had to find the funding for construction himself because there was a lack of faith that he could pull off such a radical idea. In Night Sky Wheel Ride, is about a little girl who goes to fair with her family and is excited that she is finally tall enough to ride in it. The story is written in poems about the little girls experience on the ferris wheel and the feelings it created in her. The connection I made between these two books was the Ferris Wheel itself. I think the best interactive strategy to teach these two books together would be the "activate prior knowledge" strategy. Most children in K-3 will most likely know what a ferris wheel is even if they haven't been on one. Those who have rode on one before will know

first hand the joy of being so high in the air, taking in all of your surroundings and the rush within you that it creates. By reading *Night Sky Wheel Ride* first, the students who have rode a ferris wheel before will be reminded of the joy it brought them, while the students who do not know personally what joy the ferris wheel can bring them, they will get to read about it through the perspective of the little girl in the book. After reading *Night Sky Wheel Ride*, the teacher could lead a discussion about what the children know about ferris wheels. Do they know who invented the ferris wheel, do they know when it was first created or why? Do the students know what materials are used to make the ferris wheel sturdy or how the wheel is able to go turn? The teacher would then have the students read (or read to them) the true story of how the ferris wheel came to be by reading *Mr. Ferris and His Wheel*. The students will get to learn a bit of history on the ferris wheel as well as history on life during the time, for instance about how people used to take trains long distances, like when traveling to the World's Fair. The book also has a physical science element to it because it explains some of the engineering and construction of the ferris wheel.

Tasha says

After the Eiffel Tower stunned World's Fair visitors in 1889, it was up to Chicago to impress people at their 1893 World's Fair. So a nationwide contest was announced, but unfortunately many of the designs were just slightly-modified Eiffel Towers, so all of them were rejected. George Ferris was an American engineer who had already designed big bridges, tunnels and roads across the nation. He had an idea for a structure that would not just rival the stature of the Eiffel Tower, but would also move and be able to be ridden. The judges of the contest reluctantly agreed to let him try, but would not offer him a penny of funding. Ferris managed to find a few wealthy investors to help him and construction began on the huge project of creating a delicate wheel that would be strong enough to turn filled with people. The tale of the building and invention of this now iconic ride is rich with suspense and the delight of accomplishment.

Davis has written a very successful picture book biography on George Ferris and his delight of an invention. Occasionally in the text, there are sections in smaller font that offer more details and information. It is all fascinating and those sections will be enjoyed as much as the main text. Davis clearly explains differences between today and the late 1800s, such as the lack of Internet to carry ideas. The story has plenty of dangers, lots of action and the ever-present danger of failure to carry it forward and make it enjoyable reading.

Ford's illustrations are filled with rich, deep colors that capture different times of day. They are a winning mix of straight, firm lines and hand-drawn characters and structures. The play of the two on the page makes for illustrations that are eye-catching and that draw you into the story and the time period.

This is a particularly strong picture book biography that children will pick up thanks to the everlasting appeal of the Ferris Wheel. Appropriate for ages 7-10.

Ivan says

Interesting, but a bit dry in the storytelling. None of the illustrations on the inside equal the one on the cover.

Hannah Smith says

Mr. Ferris and His Wheel is an outstanding informational text that I would use primarily in either third or fourth grade. This complex picture book informs the reader of how the ferris wheel was invented by telling the story of the 1893 Chicago World Fair. The star attraction of the previous World Fair was France's Eiffel Tower, so this time it was America's turn to show up. George Washington Gale Ferris Jr. was a young engineer at the time and had a remarkable idea of a huge structure that would move and wow the crowd. Many doubted Ferris as they thought it would collapse, so he had to use his own money to follow after his dream. With his inspiration from the water wheel, his wheel became the star attraction once it was completed and proven that it could safely spin around. Over 1.5 million passengers rode the magnificent "Monster Wheel" as it was originally named by Ferris; however, it soon was renamed after him: The Ferris Wheel. The Ferris Wheel can be found all over today, especially at state fairs. Through the use of vibrant colors and detailed pictures, the story is captured perfectly. The author's use of captions also helps the reader better understand the history of the time period and provide the reader with information that helps aid their comprehension of the text.

A way I could use this book in my classroom or other educators could use it in theirs is by using this text as a read aloud to introduce varying inventors and inventions. After reading the book, students could come up with their own invention and do a writing piece on it. Another way to use this informational text is to have it as one option for students to read in groups. By having small groups each read an informational text about a specific invention, they can create a chart to present the invention to the class so that the class can learn about a lot of inventions in a shortened time.

Mr. Ferris and His Wheel was a wow book for me because it was well written, engaging, and has a great message of how a young engineer pursued his dream despite what people told him and ended up with a successful invention. The illustrations were excellent and really complemented the text. Once I started the text, I could not put it down. I learned a lot of information about the common state fair attraction, The Ferris Wheel, through reading this information text. It was a great read and can be used in many ways in the classroom, which is why it was a wow book for me!

Claire says

The story was interesting and the illustrations were engaging. This book would be good to address the scientific method, and more generally could address the importance of persistence in an idea when no one else believes in you. This book could be taught in a number of different subject areas.

Laurie says

I borrowed this book from the library because my 4yo is fascinated by Ferris wheels. I was surprised how much I learned from reading it!

Lauren Paravate says

Summary: This book follows George Washington Gale Ferris Jr. and his journey to creating the first Ferris Wheel. At first no one believed that his new invention with the use of steel would be strong enough to hold, but he proved everyone wrong. The Chicago World's Fair housed his Ferris Wheel and on opening day in 1893 his ride opened the door to many other engineers and dreamers to create their own invention.

Evaluation: This book did a great job of telling a true story about the invention of the first Ferris Wheel, but more in a child friendly point of view. I really enjoyed all the new facts that I learned from the book such as the other places that were created because of it. Some of the examples were Disneyland and the Emerald City in the Wizard of Oz.

Teaching Idea: For upper grades a great way to incorporate their understanding on engineering skills would be creating their own Ferris Wheel or other famous building. Students could use popsicle sticks and other supplies to create their own invention like Mr. Ferris did. Before creating their structure they would research which building they were trying to replicate and construct their own.
